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## INNOVATION IN THE 'PATCHWORK' UNIVERSITY.

*the balancing act of academic middle managers in and between the micro-cultures of the interacting spheres.*

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### ABSTRACT

This article describes how academic middle managers balance between the interacting spheres of academics and administrators and how they influence innovation processes by manoeuvring through the subcultures and microcultures.

First, the question will be considered of why it is so difficult for innovations in higher education to develop smoothly. Here, the explanation is sought in the characteristics of the university as a 'patchwork' university, which makes it difficult to align people and policy. The idea behind this is that, with innovation processes, getting along the 'great majority' is an important starting point. In short, being able to exert influence on colleagues and stakeholders in the process. This is particularly difficult because many innovations within universities develop side by side, cover various topics, are at different stages of the innovation process, occur at different levels and (sometimes) seem to develop without direction.

The extent to which actors within the university experience that they have influence on actors from other departments was researched. It shows that the university can be labelled as a 'patchwork' and, furthermore, that the so-called 'third space professionals' clearly experience more influence and can therefore be seen as a separate group. They are the chief actors that are considered able to achieve innovation-alignment. This is expected because they can both manoeuvre between the organizational units of the university and can properly position the so-called 'hubs'. The question is: What do they do exactly? What roles do they fulfill? And, what competencies do they need to (a) work across departments and to (b) properly position the people? Of this, some examples are given that were collected via interviews.

### INTRODUCTION

At the regional, national, as well as the international level, there is increasing competition between universities that compete for grants, projects and programs from the European Community and other funding bodies. Moreover, universities are trying to connect the best students to their organization for the regional, national and international training market and take great care in bringing in the most talented researchers and teachers. To this end, they design new courses, specializations and tracks for students and provide additional facilities for researchers and teachers. Finally, they form coalitions and alliances with strategic partners. All this with the aim of responding to the changing world of higher education (Kallenberg, 2013).

These strategic innovations seem to happen in a coordinated and structured way. However, closer examination shows that the reality is inflexible: it is mainly the central level that is involved in strategic symmetry in innovation within universities. At the decentral level (within the institutes and departments) the topics are mostly fuelled by subject-specific ambitions and considerations. As a result of this asymmetry, it is not easy for universities to innovate strategically (Rowley et al, 1997). There are several reasons why it is so difficult for universities to realize symmetry in innovations.

### *Lack of direction*

One explanation for this difficulty is the lack of (the possibility of) direction within the university organization. Universities are large organizations with a complex organizational structure within which a multitude of different cultures exists. A common element in the university cultures is the presence of 'academic freedom', and this academic freedom leads, in regard to the decision-making processes, to concepts such as the garbage can model or 'organized anarchy' (Cohen & Marsh, 1986).

Another aspect is the blurring boundaries of the structures due to the increasing loss of hierarchical certainties, as well as the ability of university employees - due to increased media and communication technology - to connect more easily with each other and the outside world. This leads to a practice in which it becomes easier to switch between functions, teams, departments and organizational units, as well as to build relationships, to make and to maintain connections between organizations. As a result, it would be expected that through this development universities would be better able to respond to innovations.

In itself, that may be true, but this freedom also influences the direction and magnitude of the alignment of people and policy. After all, to develop, and in particular, to implement an innovation smoothly it is important to get the 'great majority' along. It is important to jump the 'chasm'. And therein appears to lie an important problem, because (1) it is unclear what this 'great majority' can go along with, and also because (2) it is unclear 'who' this great majority is. Within a university organization, there is not just one innovation that occurs at a given time, nor do innovations follow one another logically and sequentially – to the contrary. Universities are characterized by the occurrence of a palette, a multiplicity of innovations that occur simultaneously and (relatively) independently of one another. Every innovation in itself might be able to get a part of the university or a part of the university that is able to respond to the developments along. But, especially because simultaneously initiatives are taken and innovations are - independently - set in motion elsewhere within the university and in various places, this means that there is, at the same time, a muddle and a multitude of initiatives that, independently arise, develop, grow and expire. These innovations can stimulate each other, but they can just as well work against each other or cancel each other out. An example of this reality comes from my own university where a recent survey indicated that 187 innovations were initiated, without there being, or having been, any form of direction.

A first explanation for why innovations in universities do not thrive easily is thus that universities lack direction and moreover that there is a diverse force field in which innovations simultaneously - as a sum of the individual parts - suffer from levelling forces and that this, intended and unintended, ensures that the innovation is embedded in the different parts of the university, in short: the adaptive ability of the universities is great.

## *Levelling Forces*

A second explanation lies in the relationship between the different actors. Many innovations are initiated by teachers, but in their eyes innovations end up, particularly at the 'meso-level,' in sluggishness and bureaucracy and they often come to a halt "somewhere out there" (i.a. Hannah & Lester, 2009). Teachers not only accuse 'the management' of sluggishness, but particularly the administrative staff and the policy departments. From the top-management too, similar sentiments are heard. They commission renewal and innovations, but feel that they lose sight of the development of the innovation somewhere below them in the organization (i.a. Kolsaker, 2008; Hyde, Clark & Drennan, 2013).

The reason is actually as simple as it is complex: due to the fact that the university consists of a multitude of actors on different levels, all working in different teams, branches, departments, faculties, services etc. no one has a bird's eye view of the whole. In this context, it would be better to think of them as an interlinked patchwork of coalitions, in which microcultures are making the difference (Roxa, 2011; Kallenberg, 2015). Particularly in the case of innovations where multiple teams or services, etc. are involved, chances are high that one is faced with misconceptions, misinterpretations, conscious and unconscious influences which results in innovations being bogged down "somewhere out there".

This second explanation supplements the first, namely that innovations can end up in quicksand as a result of the levelling forces between the departments and sections and the roles of the various actors therein. It is, in other words, very difficult to realize people and policy alignment during innovations.

To understand this more fully, the following will provide an illustration of the university organization and the way in which groups of actors relate to each other.

### *hybrid organisation: academics versus administrators*

Descriptions of the relationship between academics and administrators<sup>1</sup> in universities have, for a long time, included terms such as 'conflictual', 'competitive', 'negative' or 'tension' (i.e. Birnbaum, 1988; Conway, 1998). While some consider that this tension is simply an organizational characteristic of universities and not necessarily a bad thing (for example: Warner & Palfreyman, 1996; Lauwerys, 2002; Bacon, 2009). Others suggest that it creates a dysfunctional divide with the two groups having different values and pursuing different goals within the one organization (for example: Dearlove, 1998; Tourish, 2000; Wohlmuther, 2008).

The separation between academics and administrators has become more strict in the later years of the last century because universities, as a result of shifts in technology, consumer behaviour, demographics, social attitudes and government funding constraints, have been driving towards a business model for operations. Universities were no longer perceived as

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<sup>1</sup> In stead of 'administrative staff' or 'not-scientific staff' I prefer to use the term 'administrators'. The term administrators refers to different groups of staff in different countries and has different meaning in each country. For instance: in the USA, administrators refers to the President and Vice-Presidents of institutions, while in Europe and Australia it is a term more often used to describe staff who are generally not employed as academics. Administrators is used to describe that group of staff in higher education who are not employed on academic academic functions of universities: education and research. The main definition of administrative staff has a negative description: a non-academic, but that is far away from the important role they fulfill in the university processes. They are the "invisible workers" (Szekeres, 2004) who provide support to students and teachers so that they can focus on the primary goal, which is teaching and learning (Iten, 2015).

communities of scholars researching and teaching together in collegial ways; and those running universities were not longer regarded as academic leaders, but more and more as managers or chief executives (Deem, 1998). Managerialism is the term used to describe changes in management approaches from collegial to more business-like practices, and the subsequent responses to shifting academic and administrative roles (McInnes, 1998; Szekeres, 2004; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Winter, 2009; Conway, 2012; Davis et al, 2014).

Because of this shift to more commercial practices, the administrative role has changed from a primarily supportive role to a coordinating, organizing and managerial role, including the need to strategically respond to external influences. This has implications for decision-making processes and has led, among other things, to the emergence of new management layers in the organization. As a result, the administrative staff experienced a sense of being increasingly removed from the primary process of education and research, while the academic staff experienced a sense of being more removed from the decision-making process. Because of this, the gap has widened between the values and beliefs of both groups on the question of how universities should be managed (McInnis, 1998; Conway, 2012).

Thus, there are two types of actors who are more or less in "two worlds" working at cross-purposes within the same hybrid university organization.

Academics are engaged with the primary tasks of the organization, namely education and research. Administrators are focused on the management and support of the primary process. Both groups try to influence each other, but at the same time they also try to maintain the most autonomous possible position relative to each other. It is also called the basic conflict between academics and administrators. Hanson (2001) describes this as the *interacting spheres model*, where conflict and dysfunctional behavior arise from too much use of hierarchy, vehement disagreements and insufficient dialogue, respect and acceptance of each other's expertise. With the rise of the 'new public management' (NPM), with a focus on cost cutting, transparency in resource allocation and increased performance management of both staff and resources, the academics and administrators increasingly relate to each other and can withdraw less well into their own area. As a result, there is more reason for clashes between the logic of the academics and that of the administrators. That is already difficult in daily contact as academics and administrators each speak their 'own language' and are very different from one another (e.g. the concept PDCA-cyclus is meaningless for a researcher and the subject content is not always recognized by the administrator). It is therefore important that the groups do not continue to talk in their own idiom.

Due to the ever stricter separation between the academics and administrators, a third group of actors has emerged that is trying to stimulate the cooperation and integration between the academics and administrators (see for example: Conway, 2000; McMaster, 2003; Szekeres, 2004, Whitchurch, 2006, 2008b; Scheijderberg & Merkator 2013). This group of actors partly came into existence due to the shift to more commercial practices by the universities. In addition, due to the increasingly decentralized decision-making on education-related matters, there has been an increased specialization in the faculties. This new group of agents is referred to as blended professionals, new professionals (Klumpp & Teichler, 2008) or third space professionals (Whitchurch, 2006, 2008a).

In this 'third space' two types of professionals are employed, namely academic (middle) managers and educational administrators. Academic middle managers are scholars who - in addition to their academic position - are charged with administrative tasks and perform roles

and functions such as Academic Dean, Academic director, Head of Study, programme coordinators, Directors of Studies, academic programme directors, Head of Departments, etcetera (i.a. Kallenberg, 2013, 2015; Harboe, 2013; Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2012; Nguyen, 2013). Educational administrators are highly qualified administrators who play a key role on strategy, policy processes and education development and have gained a certain degree of autonomy and power within the academia. They perform functions such as director education affairs; head quality control, etcetera (Kallenberg, 2013, 2016a, 2016b).

I use the concept of academic middle manager following Hellawell & Hancock (2001) as an umbrella-term to indicate the specific functions such as those mentioned above. Similar to the concept of academic middle manager are also other concepts used to give meaning to academics who bear, temporarily or permanently, (educational) responsibility for an educational program, department or faculty in the role of manager and leader. Examples are: middle-leadership (Branson, Franken & Penney, 2016), academic middle leaders (Preston & Floyd, 2016), middle-level leader-academic (Inman, 2007), academic manager (Mercer, 2009), mid-level academic manager (i.a. Inman, 2007; Whitchurch, 2008a; Larsen et al, 2009); manager academics (Deem & Brehony, 2005) and academic dean (Wolverton et al, 2001; Vieira da Motta & Bolan, 2008). Although the concepts of management and leadership are essentially different (management concerns 'doing things right', while leadership concerns 'doing the right things'), the academic middle manager fulfills roles in both areas.

Both an educational administrator and an academic middle manager are balancing on the intersection of management and leadership. An academic middle manager acts as a figurehead for the academics in the workplace, he inspires and provides direction. The same goes for the educational administrator in regard to his employees in his team. Moreover, both the academic middle manager and the educational administrator is responsible for carrying out policy that has been delegated to him and informing, coordinating and auditing as a manager. The way in which they fulfill and give shape to both these 'roles', 'colors' them as either a leader or a manager and this leads to a particular distribution of roles that can differ per academic middle manager or educational administrator (see i.a. Kallenberg, 2013).

Recent research shows that for a Dutch situation there is still a strict separation between administrators and academics regarding their activities and interests. Moreover, it shows that the interacting spheres in itself also consist of various independently operating departments, teams and groups, resulting in the idea of a patchwork university. Finally, it appears that - compared to academics and administrators - third space professionals experience having influence throughout the various university processes (Kallenberg, 2016b). A follow-up study showed that this is not a typically Dutch phenomenon, but that it also occurs in Belgium and Denmark (Kallenberg, 2016c). Especially because this group of professionals experiences more influence on the different processes within the university, it is interesting to see whether, and if so, how this group uses their (experienced) influence to adopt a managing role during innovation processes and sidestep the levelling forces within the university.

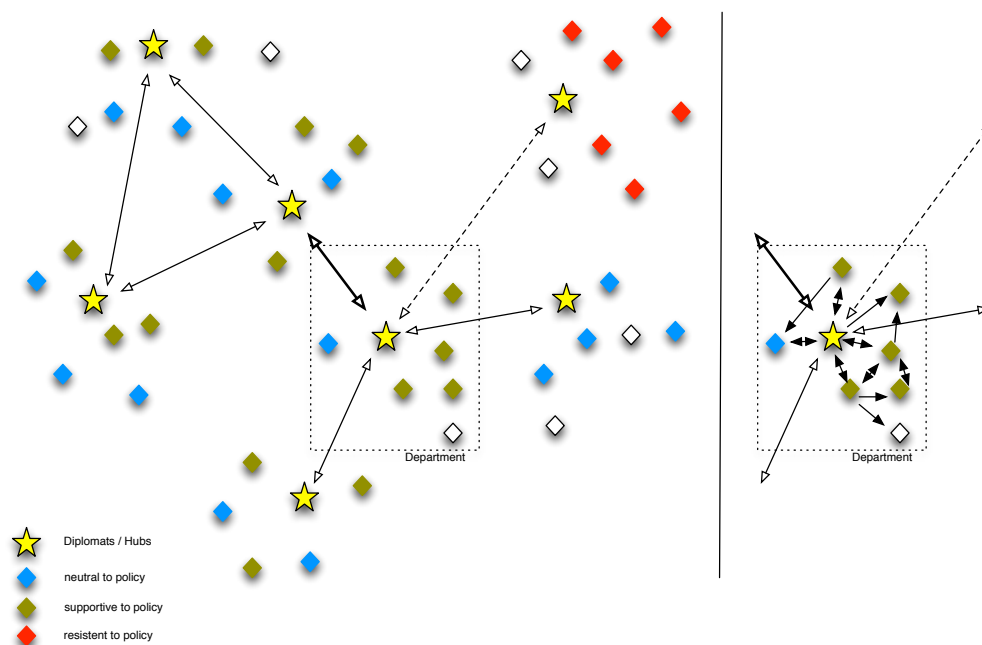
### *sub-cultures and micro-cultures*

Before we do this, it is relevant to bring in yet another perspective. Until now, the perspective has been focused on the academics and administrators. When we look more closely at these groups, large differences can be determined and microcultures can be seen.

Within a university organization there is a layering of all sorts of subcultures and microcultures or, in other words, a multi-colored palette of 'subcultures' and within it various microcultures. Within subcultures characteristics are shared, where the subculture distinguishes itself from the parent culture in which they are embedded. An example of this within the university is the 'academic culture' (among the academics) and the 'machine bureaucratic culture' (among the administrators).

Microcultures are situated at an even deeper level and also share distinctive characteristics with itself in regard to the parent culture, though are determined, even more so than subcultures, by its small (physical) scale. Examples of this are a team; a family; a collaborative group of students; the work situation within a (small) hallway in an office, etc. Mårtensson and Roxå (2014) define a microculture as a culture that exists in the meso level, and where its members are perceived by themselves and/or by others to share a context over time (Roxå, 2014, p.39). Microcultures and subcultures arise through forms of socialization, in which the (new) person within a group quickly picks up the rites and values of the members of the group. Through the process of socialization, people internalize knowledge, attitudes, values and beliefs, and as a result they also view the reality around them similarly in terms of ethnocentrism (the tendency that people have to evaluate others according to their own standards and experiences. While this tendency can connect people, it can also cause serious obstacles in cross-cultural interactions), perception (what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell is, as a whole, determined by our culture), categorization (the cognitive process by which man simplifies the world around him by grouping certain stimuli. These categories give meaning to our perceptions) and stereotypes (the man-made socially constructed categories. Stereotypes are mostly negative in nature and meaning and have an ethnocentric idea of the other).

Figure 1: Example of micro-cultures



Especially the microcultures have influence on the course of innovations within organizations. After all, multiple departments are involved in this and thus you are also dealing with multiple microcultures. The role of the third space professional in this is crucial because this person

must try to create the alignment of people and policy. This means he should basically create a network of so-called 'hubs'. This network should not only be characterized by its focus on the (content of the) innovation itself, but also by its development as a type of alternative model of management, based on relational and social learning theories. Especially because an innovation not always has a clear beginning and a clear end, and because it will not be the only innovation within the organization, it is relevant to work on a community of practice within the organization: a model of situated learning based on the idea of engagement in learning communities (Wenger & Lave, 1991). The idea of a community of practice is intended to encourage an alternative or complementary view of learning as an ongoing, social and intersubjective experience. It is proposed that individuals will come together and form communities based on common interests and a desire to enhance their own learning and development (Preston & Floyd, 2016).

Therefore, it has been researched how third space professionals manoeuvre between and through the different cultures, islands or 'patches' and how they use their influence to 'get things done' or to let things fail.

### DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH:

This study focuses on the presence of the hybrid organization form and the extent to which employees from different departments within the university experience that they have influence on the processes of other departments. It aims to provide an explanation for the presence of microcultures and the lack of direction and the levelling forces within the university. In addition, the expectation is that the so-called third space professionals experience significantly more influence on the processes within the university than the academics or administrators. To this end, it will be examined to what extent the third space professionals differ from academics and administrators regarding their perceived influence on different processes within the university.

Subsequently, this study examines what kind of activities the third space professionals perform and what roles they fulfill. To answer the research question, the research method was a dual phase: an online survey (SurveyMonkey) and interviews.

#### *Online survey*

The online questionnaire was distributed among employees at six Dutch universities during May and June of 2015, five Flemish universities during April and May 2016, and four Danish universities during June and July 2016. The online survey was sent to 1,632 Dutch-addresses, 2,521 Flemish-addresses and 1,580 Danish addresses. The survey was in Dutch language to Dutch and Flemish universities and in Danish language to Danish universities. The reason for this was that the survey was also sent to less highly trained staff within the university, of which it was expected that this would lead to a lower number of respondents. It has been realized that this may affect the response rate of the number of foreign workers at the university.

These addresses were obtained from the universities' websites. The addresses were manually selected to achieve the best possible allocation between representatives of the three different spheres: academics, administrators and the new professionals (academic managers

and educational administrators). Employees of a different type<sup>2</sup> were either not selected or removed from the database. The 1,632 Dutch-addresses yielded 548 respondents (31.63%). The 2,521 Flemish-addresses survey yielded 768 respondents (30.46%). The 1,580 Danish addresses yielded 453 respondents (28.67%)<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the invitation email, two reminders were sent at intervals of eight days. A non-response study has not been conducted.

The raw data set was then analyzed and tested for aspects such as normality, relationships between the research variables, missing values and outliers. This has led to the removal of several respondents for various reasons (such as incompleteness, obstruction, etc.) from the three data sets. These were respectively 61 (Dutch), 157 (Flemish) and 144 (Danish), so that a workable dataset remained for each country of respectively 490 (Dutch), 611 (Flemish) and 309 (Danish). The three data sets have been merged into one workable dataset of 1,410 respondents.

The questionnaire sought basic information, including: age, gender, qualifications, nature and organizational location of the post, etc. Furthermore information was collected about the extent to which they experience in having influence on several processes in the academic and administrative domains and about the extent to which they want to have influence on processes in these domains. The study considers processes on three levels: (1) curriculum processes (content, development, implementation, and testing); (2) education support processes (study & student counselling, education logistics & planning, students & exam administration, educational engineering & infrastructure, internal & external communication); and (3) education conditional processes (like financial affairs, human resources, governance, quality assurance, strategic issues).

These three levels of processes represent all processes that come up within an educational organization and can therefore be seen as both a teaching process model and an educational-organizational model (Kallenberg, 2016b).

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<sup>2</sup> Examples include staff from central services, such as real estate / library / student counsellor / academic affairs / personnel / finance / Admissions Office / maintenance / special collections / IT support / copy, print & mail / facilities / audiovisual service and reception staff. At the faculty level, employees such as secretaries of the board, reception staff and research staff such as analysts, conservators and (policy) employees were excluded. The same applies to visiting researchers / external PhD students / guest staff / interns and student assistants.

<sup>3</sup> In this concept paper not yet all the Danish respondents have been taken into the dataset because of lack of time just in front of the conference.



Figure 2 - Model of educational processes. The inner circle shows the educational process (curriculum), the central circle shows the education support processes and the outermost circle shows the education conditional processes (Kallenberg, 2016b).



The results of the survey provide a quantitative answer to questions of whether there are indeed differences between the spheres and also to what extent they differ from or resemble one another, can be answered in a quantitative sense. A more detailed description of the results has been described in another paper (Kallenberg, 2016c), therefore this paper limits itself to describing some of the striking results of this survey<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, this article will not discuss any differences between the three countries. While there are some minor differences, these are generally not of influence on the narrative of this article and will be differentiated elsewhere.

## Interviews

During the interviews with third space professionals the central question was how they interpret their activities. The aim was to gain insight as to what skills they use to ensure a smooth development of innovations within the university. In this regard, the third space professionals were asked to what extent they were aware of their position and the way in which they could potentially make use of the existing microcultures to have innovations succeed or fail. The interviewees all had at least several years of experience in the position in which they worked now. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted in the period May-July 2016 with third space professionals from three different countries.

<sup>4</sup>The author of this paper has the intention to elaborate both papers and complete them to articles for the purpose of a scientific publication in a book or journal.

## RESULTS SURVEY

### *General*

The number of respondents is 1,410, of which 47,2% is male and 52,8% is female. There is an even spread of age in clusters of five years, with a median in the cluster between 41-45 years. 56,9% of the respondents belong to the academic staff, of which 69,1% has obtained a doctoral degree (PhD). Within the administrators' group, more than 13,1% has obtained a doctoral degree and 44,7% a Masters degree.

Firstly, in Table 1, some data is presented on the entire group of respondents, such as the male/female ratio; the average age; and the highest level of education.

Table 1 - some general information on respondents divided between the three countries.

	The Netherlands	Belgium	Denmark	Total
Male / Female	52,0% / 48,0%	42,5% / 57,5%	48,7 % / 51,3%	47,2 % / 52,8 %
Age (median in)	46-50 year	36-40 year	41-45 year	
Degree (Ba / Ma / PhD) in % Other degree	10,7 / 23,9 / 58,7 5,9%	15,7 / 37,1 / 31,8 15,3%	10,3 / 33,3 / 52,3 3,9%	13,1 / 32,6 / 45,6 8,6%
Academic	245 51,1%	290 47,6%	160 51,8%	695 49,7%
Administrator	161 33,6%	246 40,4%	84 27,2%	491 35,1%
Academic Middle Manager	54 11,3%	43 7,1%	46 14,9%	143 10,2%
Educational Administrator	19 4,0%	30 4,9%	19 6,1%	68 4,9%

From Table 1 it is noticeable that the majority of the Belgium respondents is female and the average age is younger than in the Netherlands and Denmark. In terms of education, the percentage of respondents that receive a doctorate is highest in the Netherlands (58.7%). Of the Flemish respondents only 31.8% received their doctorate, which is significantly less than in the Netherlands and Denmark. The discrepancy is explained by the fact that the group of Belgium academics consists, for a larger part (than the Netherlands and Denmark), of PhD students who have not yet received their doctorate. Another striking difference is that among the Flemish respondents there is a much higher percentage (40.4%) of administrators, especially compared to Denmark (27.2%). The percentage of respondents from third space professionals (= the sum of the academic middle managers and educational administrators), however, is higher in Denmark (21.0%) than in the Netherlands (15.3%) and Belgium (12.0%). Although it is not claimed that the group of respondents is representative of the population of employees at universities in the different countries, there seem to be fewer actors involved in the overhead in Denmark (33.3%) compared with Flanders (45.3%).

### *Breakdown by type of actor*

It is interesting to describe the results broken down by type of actor. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the experienced influence on the various processes by type of actor and area of work. Note that only a distinction between the academics and the administrators is made.

The academics are shown in three groups, namely Professors; Associate/Assistant Professors; and research assistants, researchers in training and researchers. The administrators are displayed by type of process in which they operate. The so-called third space professionals are included in these two groups. Academic middle managers are often also Professors or Associate Professors, while educational administrators often also work with the content of quality assurance or governance. If a country employs a significantly different structure, it has been mentioned separately.

Regarding the academics, it is remarkable that the Professors both experience influence on the educational processes and on the educational conditional processes. Professors experience little influence on the educational support processes. The exception to this is the experienced influence on the logistic processes. Moreover, from the degree of influence they want to have on these processes (clearly more) it is clear that they apparently have an interest in being involved at certain times in (the provision of) education Associate/Assistant Professors and research assistants, researchers in training and researchers admittedly experience influence on the educational processes (though less than the Professors), but they experience little to very limited influence on the processes of the educational support or the educational conditional processes.

The administrators generally only experience influence on their own area of work. Outside their own area of work they experience no influence whatsoever. The exception to this are the administrators who have the planning of education in their portfolio (monitoring). They apparently have more coordinating tasks, so that they work together with other actors and therefore experience more influence. Additionally, the administrators who work on governance and quality assurance score high on multiple subjects. It should be noted that the scores of this group could be influenced by the fact that this group also includes many third space professionals (such as Head of Education; Head Education affairs, etc.). From this table it is clearly visible that the cooperation between the various departments and sections is very limited.

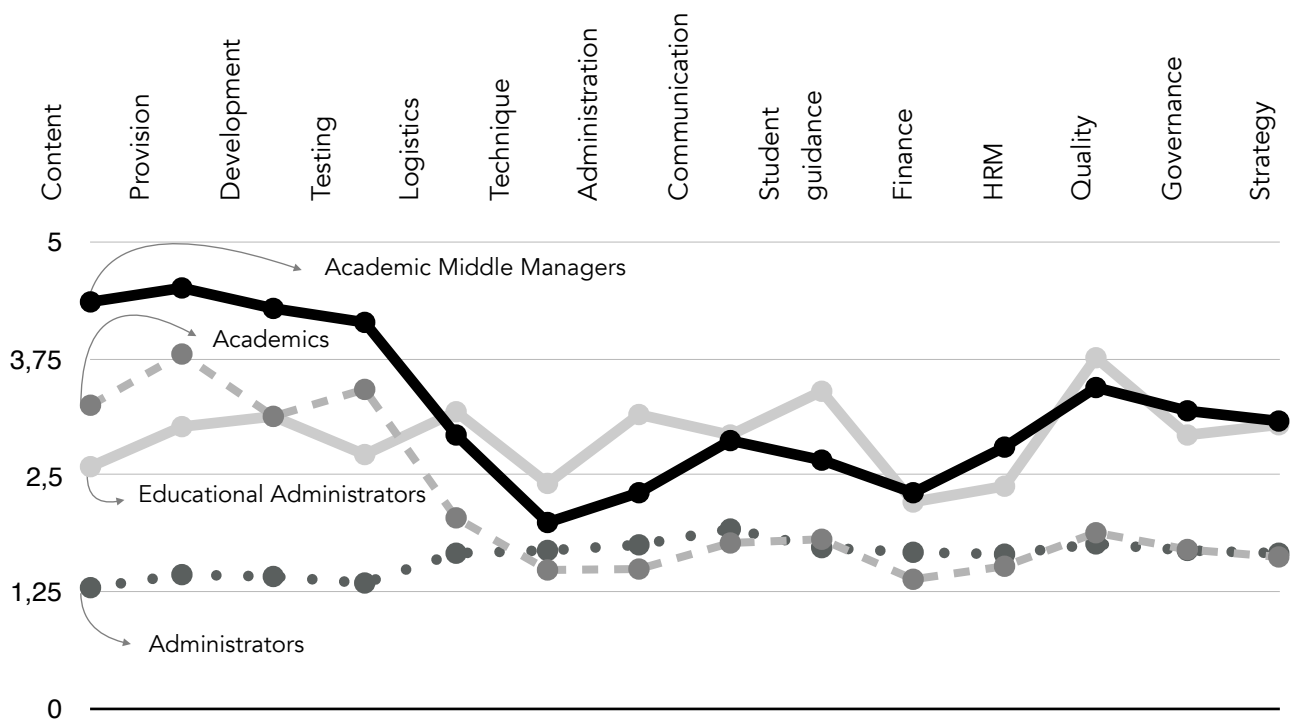
Table 2 - breakdown by type of actor (scores above 2.50 are marked in grey).

	cont ent	prov ision	deve lopment	testi ng	logi stics	tech nique	adm inist ration	com muni cation	stud ent guid ance	fin ance	HRM	quali ty	gove rnance	strat egy
Professor	4,06	4,25	3,82	4,01	2,51	1,79	1,91	2,33	2,34	2,25	2,66	2,93	3,03	2,90
Assistant/Associate Professor	3,80	4,18	3,68	3,81	2,34	1,60	1,64	1,98	2,02	1,39	1,61	2,12	1,83	1,68
Research Assistant/ Researcher in Training/Researcher	2,42	3,28	2,43	2,80	1,72	1,36	1,38	1,62	1,53	1,16	1,18	1,57	1,29	1,34
Scaffolding	1,63	2,04	1,82	1,46	2,04	1,51	2,23	2,35	4,00	1,25	1,28	2,04	1,63	1,73
Monitoring	1,59	1,59	1,83	1,80	3,67	1,96	2,69	2,41	2,56	1,46	1,43	2,02	1,78	1,55
Administrating	1,18	1,38	1,24	1,31	1,69	1,35	2,73	1,96	1,61	1,59	1,55	1,48	1,49	1,43
Facilitating	1,13	1,36	1,29	1,21	1,29	3,23	1,25	1,42	1,23	1,68	1,48	1,57	1,51	1,42
Communication	1,12	1,10	1,20	1,10	1,12	1,20	1,24	3,75	1,41	1,37	1,29	1,35	1,73	1,90
Finance	1,07	1,14	1,09	1,16	1,20	1,30	1,22	1,36	1,09	3,78	1,87	1,57	1,71	1,56
Human Resources	1,02	1,02	1,02	1,00	1,07	1,26	1,10	1,12	1,05	1,49	3,70	1,33	1,60	1,42
Governance / Quality Assurance	2,07	2,37	2,61	2,38	2,46	1,89	2,53	2,36	2,53	1,94	2,00	3,57	2,82	3,00

### Four types of actors

When we compare these scores with the four types of actors it creates a varied picture as shown in Figure 2. From Figure 2 it is clearly visible that the third space professionals (academic middle managers and educational administrators) clearly experience more influence on the various subjects than the academics or the administrators. Administrators experience only really experience influence on their own area of work, while the academics mainly experience influence on the educational processes. Third space professionals experience more than average influence on all processes.

Figure 2 - experienced influence of the four types of groups.



These results show that a clear distinction can be seen in the experienced influence on the various topics by the three groups: academics, administrators and third space professionals. The administrators only experienced influence on their own area of work, academics only experienced influence on the educational processes, and third space professionals experienced influence on most subjects and work areas. Of course the academics will also experience influence on the educational processes, however, this was not included in this study. However, the academics in regard to the field of educational processes should not be seen as a homogeneous group, because here too each academic feels particularly responsible for the educational processes in which they themselves are involved. This aspect was not taken into account in this study, but there are several reports that have previously shown this (see for example: Birnbaum, 1988; Conway, 1998; Roxå, 2011; Harboe, 2013).

It can therefore be argued that the university can be seen as a 'patchwork' of various interests in which employees within the university characterise themselves by being focused on a very small fraction of the many products that the university provides. In other words: everyone pursues a different objective; there is a lack of clarity and agreement on the goals of the organization as a whole and this affects the way people work. In regard to that orientation, there is no difference between the academics and the administrators whatsoever. Thus the results of previous research (Kallenberg, 2016b) are again confirmed.

Between the three countries there are several relevant differences that can be named. It seems that in Denmark there is a larger percentage of third space professionals than in the Netherlands and Flanders. Additionally, the Danish educational administrators experience more influence on educational processes than their Dutch and Flemish colleagues. Furthermore, the Danish educational administrators are a group of actors who on the field of educational conditional processes experience by far the most influence. In short: the Danish educational administrators seem to have an important position within the universities. Finally, it seems that the percentage of administrators (also referred to as 'overhead') is larger in Flanders than in the Netherlands and Denmark.

Now that it has been established that third space professionals indeed experience more influence on the various differentiated processes and thus perhaps also have more 'attention for the greater good' of the institution than the other groups, the question arises of how they deal with the situation of the patchwork university. After all, the fact that the university is characterized by all kinds of small isolated groups also means that there is a wide variety of habits, customs, rules and specialties, in short, all kinds of micro-cultures. How does the third space professional navigate these micro-cultures?

### *Activities of the third space professionals*

To that end, the survey asked the third space professionals which tasks they perform during innovations. Four types of tasks were put before the respondents (see table 3), which are based on both the general management literature and on the educational management literature. These four types of tasks have been connected by, among others, Kallenberg (2013) to the four roles that academic middle managers fulfil, namely Guard, Guide, Diplomat and Constructor. The Guard focuses on keeping the organization going and performs administrative tasks. The Guide focuses on the establishment and maintenance of the cohesion and development of the employees within the organization and performs relational tasks. The Diplomat focuses on seeking creative ways and resources to realize his vision and performs intervening tasks. The Constructor focuses on realizing goals and performs result-oriented tasks. An academic middle manager always fulfils several of these roles simultaneously, but the way in which and the extent to which he fulfils these roles 'colours' his behaviour and role and with that his influence during innovations.

Table 3 shows the result of this. Thereby, a distinction was made between the academic middle managers and the educational administrators. With the academic middle managers it stands out that they least often fulfil the administrative tasks, while they perform the intervening tasks the most, followed in second place by the relational tasks. With the educational administrators it stands out that they too least often fulfil administrative tasks and that they most often perform result-oriented tasks, with intervening tasks in second place. Between these two groups there is a (relatively) small difference, namely that the academic middle manager is mainly characterized by a combination of the roles of Diplomat and Guide (something that is in accordance with a previous study [Kallenberg, 2013]) and the educational administrator is characterized by a combination of Constructor and Diplomat.

**Table 3 - activities of third space professionals**

how often do you fulfill the following activities? 1 = almost never /.../ 5 = daily	Academic middle managers	Educational Administrators
<i>administrative activities</i> managing work of teams or colleagues; planning, administrating, monitoring and controlling structures and processes; etc. (Tucker, 1992; Bennett & Figuli, 1990; Gold, 1998; Gunter & Rutherford, 2000; Boyko & Jones, 2010);	2,45	3,37
<i>relational activities</i> based on substantive discourse of meetings and building trust among colleagues (Meek et al, 2010; Boyko & Jones, 2010);	3,84	3,42
<i>intervening activities</i> diplomacy between and within (central) management and academic values; negotiating (Meek et al., 2010; Boyko & Jones, 2010);	4,11	3,79
<i>result oriented activities</i> attending to student performance, efficiency and effectiveness (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Wolverton, Ackerman & Holt, 2005; Verhoeven, 2007).	3,58	4,09
	N = 143	N = 68

If we further examine both results of the survey, it can be established that (1) the third space professionals clearly distinguish themselves from the academics and the administrators in regard to their experienced influence on the processes within the different departments of the university, and (2) that their tasks are characterized by the fact that they (academic middle managers) are mainly focused on intervening tasks and on maintaining relationships throughout the organization.

Applied to innovations in education this invites the question of what skills they need to manoeuvre between the different departments and moreover to create the right alliances to be able to actually give shape to innovations. To this end, several interviews were conducted with academic middle managers and the following will provide an account of some of the most notable aspects.

## RESULTS INTERVIEWS

During the interviews with third space professionals various topics were discussed. First, the experienced position and role fulfillment; then they were asked to give an example of their contribution to a successful innovation and an example of an innovation that they did not support; then they were asked in which way they (un)consciously dealt with the microcultures and, finally, they were asked to describe their own competencies. The following briefly summarizes these topics.

### *Innovations*

The first interview topic was that third space professionals were asked to describe their tasks during innovations.

Several third space professionals indicated that they are actually continuously faced with all sorts of innovations. Things that they themselves have initiated, but also innovations with

which they are "suddenly" faced. That in itself makes sense because - especially large - educational organizations sometimes appear to be in a permanent state of change. Education is never 'finished' and this results in people continuously and always working on the changes of the educational process or the organization thereof. Curricula change as a result of new insights and requirements of internal and external stakeholders. Views on what good education is change which results in education support processes also continuously changing. Changing continuously and routinely does not necessarily lead to improvements and especially older third space professionals recognize recurring cycles of desires to change in education. That recognition tempt them to passing cynical remarks:

*[AMM03] "In our faculty the discussion again arose about the layout of the schedule. There was a group of teachers that wanted to return to the semester system (instead of 4 blocks - ed.) about which they spoke in both the meetings, and, even worse ... with everyone that wanted to lend an ear ... Yes, sometimes those kinds of random forces are tiresome."*

*- [\*] What did you do?*

*[AMM03] "I went in 'head first'. First, I once again brought out the argumentation of our previous decision and showed it to them. Because at that time we thoroughly investigated the issue. I also sent the educationist their way to explain to them the background of the choices that we made. And after that I summoned them to my office for a meeting and told them that I don't want any unrest in the organization."*

*- [\*] Did that help?*

*[AMM3] "(ha, ha) yes, what did you think? Of course, they're back in their pen."*

The third space professional in this example has, in regard to his/her tasks, proceeded from a hierarchical perspective, where a possible initiative to innovation has been nipped in the bud. Experienced third space professionals also make use of "ducking":

*[EA07] "Last year, that teacher wanted to completely change the program at the very last minute. But, yeah, ... the scheduling had already been finalized, the study guide text had been published and only a few weeks later the teaching would start. I sent his request to the central scheduling department. I know that they handle these things in order of receipt ... or I should have called or went by to arrange it more quickly ... and then it always takes a few working days. Then I received the message that it was not feasible. So that's what I replied."*

This example shows that the third space professional is not really that interested in the administrative task, but also that he - by using this 'official' procedure - is consciously stopping a change.

Of course, there are also examples of a more proactive and positive influence of third space professionals during innovations. Some third space professionals indicated that they regularly took initiatives for change because they wanted to achieve something either substantive or organizational.

*[AMM01] "In the field of digital exams, we as an organization, had to do something, so when [name teacher] came up with this idea, I immediately brought him in contact with the technical service, and I also set up a project group, where the educationist led the process and the teacher could try out his ideas. From the policy makers I received a budget that I was allowed to spend at my own discretion. ... I also regularly brought his initiative to the attention of my colleagues within the university as well as his fellow teachers ... I really hoped for emulation from them, ha ha ... At the team meetings I also let him report and present on the progress several times. Yes, that all went very quickly, and I am happy with that. "*

The example shows that the third space professional in this situation used the resources and opportunities for innovation to directly and positively stimulate an innovation. Precisely because she did this, a positive climate developed for the initiative to further develop.

## *Experienced Position and Role Fulfillment*

A striking result of the interviews was that all third space professionals, both academic middle managers and educational administrators, showed that they were aware of the sandwich position they function in as middle-level managers. An academic middle manager commented:

*[AMM004] "I know my capabilities well. When it comes to, for example, decision-making, I ensure that I stay as close to the dean as possible. I prepare him for the necessity of the decision that we must take. I prefer to do so in a one on one conversation, because he will be more open to my argument. Only if I get the feeling that I can convince him, I submit something for a decision to the board. The advantage for me is that I am backed by the dean so that I can take the wind out of the institute directors' sails. Sometimes I do it the other way around. But I must, at the least, have some backup. Because if I don't have any backup, it means that I - in every case up until now - will be pushed away in the power play between the dean and the institute directors, and then the finger is always pointed at me. And I do not care for that (any more)."*

The example above shows that the academic middle manager knows how to deal with the actors within the organization that are above or below him. It is an image that was shown in several interviews. The third space professional should be able to cleverly manoeuvre between the people and processes within the organization. Especially because the third space professional moves between the layers and spheres of the organization, he acquires a lot of tacit knowledge that he can employ in different areas of the organization to help tilt a process in his favour.

Another noteworthy point in the interviews is that most third space professionals indicate that they are aware of the fact that they are wedged between the interests of the academics and those of the administrators, and that they have to balance between those interests. For educational administrators this seems to be more difficult than for the academic middle managers (who are a part of the academics). A few educational administrators indicated that they experience being critically approached by academics and that their expertise and knowledge that are necessary to manage universities are more or less denied and undermined by academics. They signalled that this 'contempt' influences their interaction with academics. An educational administrator [EA007]:

*"We never question their expertise in their discipline, but they question ours."*

and also

*"Some teachers regularly tend to show that they do the 'real work' (teaching and research) and that the status and reputation of the institution depends on it. What we do is inferior. I also often have allegations hurled at me, that I belong to some kind of administrative mafia, or that I'm a bureaucrat or something. That can be difficult sometimes, yes. Anyway, I try to stay focused on the goal that we are trying to achieve together. By keeping that clear and by communicating, and by continuing to invest in the relationship, I still ultimately get what I want."*

Typical of the position of the third space professional is that he/she is, in several different ways, wedged between interests and groups. Kallenberg (2007; 2013) distinguishes among others top-down vs. bottom-up; professionals vs. administrators; education vs. research; and hierarchy vs. collegiality. In this example too, the third space professional is faced with a conflict of interest between the academics and (his role as an administrator), and in addition hierarchy versus collegiality. In this example, it is clear that the authority of the administrator is being disputed. He responds by trying to maintain a good relationship (choice for collegiality) and by remaining focused on the intended aim. The lack of recognized authority, however, also means that it is difficult for the educational administrator to influence the behaviour of the



academics. What is problematic in this example is that the administrator appears to be unable to clearly demonstrate where their value lies and what contributions they make to the work of the academics. According to Conway (1998), three things must be acknowledged by academics for good cooperation, namely (1) the value of the administrative work; (2) that administrators are indeed a professional group of employees who are to accomplish the management of the university without destroying the academic integrity, and (3) that the institutes in which they work and the academic traditions and ways of working are unique and deserve their respect. In short, mutual recognition and respect.

### *Microcultures*

A third topic was related the way in which the third space professionals navigate to a greater or lesser extent between the departments and the microcultures within the university organization. The interviews gave a fairly unequivocal picture namely that third space professionals are aware of the fact that departments do not or hardly collaborate with each. During the interview, several third space professionals provided examples of the possibility of knowledge gained in one situation being reused in another situation. Also in regard to the course of action and intervention in different situations, several third space professionals indicated that they were aware that they acted within the various administrative departments in various ways. Only a few third space professionals reported that they consciously created a 'network' of people from different departments or put together a team to work on innovative projects.

*[AMM08] "I know who I need from each of the departments ... within such a department ... to get things done. That doesn't necessarily mean that I'm going to talk with the head of such a department. Not always, but in some cases, I deliberately go around it, because then I can discuss things with someone who is knowledgeable, pro-active and goes out and get things done. [...] I try to get a group like that, of people from different departments, in the management group. Because then you group people together who all think and act beyond the boundaries of a department. And that works!"*

One third space professional indicated that he had deliberately sought out people from different departments by creating a kind of sociogram:

*[AE02]. For a project, I had to put together an interdisciplinary team of employees from different departments. I had meetings with several staff members, in which I asked them for five names of people they liked working with. Because I did this with several people spread across multiple departments, I got a good idea of a network of people who were 'desired'. ... From a number of those people I created the project team and that is a super team! ... I created a group that is very pro-actively focused on cooperation, but also thinks beyond the boundaries of the department. ... That's a great project to work on! You never hear what can't be done, and everyone thinks in terms of possibilities. Yes ... great and a stark contrast to other projects that I also work on."*

As much as knowledge of current microcultures can have a positive effect on the development of an innovation, it also has its negative aspects. The third space professional can - in such cases - try to take this into account:

*[EA07] "You just know that when it comes to marketing, it will go wrong. Those people from the communication department; you just can't work with them. It takes you hours to explain what you want, and just when you think you've succeeded in this, they give you advice on how to do it yourself, while I really came to them to ask them to do it. ... These people seem to try their absolute best to have to do as little as possible ... When it then comes to increase our marketing strategy for recruiting new students ... we are mostly on our own and it's better to go around that*

department and not get them involved at all. But of course that's annoying and it also means compromising the innovation process."

And:

[AMM10] "I don't know what it is ... some departments are great to work with, but there are others ... for instance that shared service centre ... it is like a jar of syrup ... one big sticky mass ... everything goes at a snail's pace... while when you speak to an individual, they're fine, but as a team ... I don't know what happens over there. Somehow they have a strong slowing effect on each other ... So I try to deal with them as little as possible. ... That only produces negative energy."

Microcultures within or between departments, influence the way in which innovation processes are started. In some cases, third space professionals consciously and unconsciously make use of the positive sides of microcultures (for instance when it comes to putting together a project group) and in other cases they actively try to avoid certain teams (cultures), to have as little issues as possible during certain work processes.

### *Skills / competences*

The final topic covered how third space professionals viewed themselves and what skills / competences they, as especially important qualities, ascribed to themselves.

Several third space professionals indicated that they had come into this role without any 'prior knowledge'. That was particularly true for the academic middle managers. They were asked for a role as, for example, program director and were then thrown in at the deep end without receiving a training on academic leadership or management to prepare them for that role.

[AMM03] "I remember when I was asked, and I thought it was an honour, so I agreed. A few weeks later I got a letter that I was program director for a period of three years, starting from around that date. Then, when I asked how I could best prepare myself for it, it turned out they hadn't really thought about that." ...

Fortunately, I was very much supported by my education coordinator. She taught me, especially in the beginning, what I had to pay attention to ... Without her everything would have gone wrong ... Yes, I still very much depend on her."

This example is an illustration of the lack of guidance or training for newly appointed academic middle managers. It is an issue that, until now, has received little attention, claims among others Floyd (2016). Academics who take on administrative roles such as heads of departments and even vice-chancellors require a set of skills and knowledge very different to those used for their academic work. It is not self-evident that an academic middle manager 'just' has these skills and knowledge. Therefore, academic middle managers should first be properly trained in education management before being appointed their roles. Because this was a widely shared experience by the interviewees, in the interviews it also became clear that - in terms of their skills - they have to rely mainly on their own qualities.

Some skills were named often: authority

[AMM03] "Fortunately, in my field I am kind of 'a name' and I do notice that because of that I can raise some issues more easily and that I will also be accepted."

or rather the lack of it (named a few times by educational administrators)

[EA07] "I regularly have to prove myself in the eyes of the teachers. They think my field (education management - ed.) is not interesting and apparently think that I am not a researcher. That makes it hard ..."

Other skills that were named several times lie mainly in the spectrum of social skills: the ability to make connections between people, communication skills, problem solving, confidence-giving, etc.

*[AMM09]: I often search out closeness. I visit people, I talk to them, listen to them and bring groups together to discuss the state of affairs and to collectively search for solutions. That's really easy for me, yes ... Then again, it obviously takes a lot of time ... but I also think it has effect. My teachers know that they can always drop by and that I will try my best to lend them an ear. I give them that trust ... which in turn offers me the ability to ask things of them from a safe environment."*

Finally, the ability to balance and navigate between various interests was named in several interviews.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey have clearly shown that the different departments and types of actors vary greatly in regard to the influence they experience on the various processes within the university. The university can be seen as a patchwork in which many processes do not fit together or are closely related. This is both due to a kind of 'working-apart-together' relationship between actors and departments, and due to a layering of university subcultures and micro-cultures, or, in other words, there is a multi-coloured palette of subcultures containing a variety of micro-cultures. Subcultures that can be distinguished are for instance the 'academic culture' of the academics and the 'machine bureaucratic culture' of the administrators. Within (and between) these subcultures, micro-cultures also exist. Micro-cultures are, even more than subculture, defined by aspects such (physical) small-scaleness, for example, within a team; a collaborative group of students; or the work situation on a (small) corridor at an office (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011).

This article further shows that there is a clear separation between the third space professionals and the academics and administrators regarding the experienced influence on different processes in the university organization. The third space professionals are thereby distinguished from the academic middle managers and educational administrators. The academic middle managers primarily perform intervening tasks and relational tasks, while the educational administrators mainly perform result-oriented tasks and intervening tasks. The third space professionals move - more so than the academics and administrators - through the organization and are involved in multiple processes and projects.

As stated above, the university may be seen as a patchwork where a multitude of innovations that occur simultaneously and in different places and on different levels and stages. Third space professionals are often confronted with these innovations and are expected to deal with them. The big challenge for the third space professional lies in the fact that he must ensure a smooth development of the innovation. In dealing with innovation, he also has to consider various actors within and outside the university that all act independently, arbitrarily and crisscross. Third space professionals are negotiating and looking for alignment, consultation, cooperation, etc. To get things moving and to make decisions in consultation, it requires certain skills to act effectively and efficiently in this zone. It's their challenge to align people and policy in order to increase the institutions' efficiency. To do this, they have to navigate smoothly between the microcultures in the organization.

In doing so, the third space professional is confronted with a number of limitations and opportunities. Limitations because the third space professional is in fact encapsulated within

various processes and has to deal with an imbalance in role expectations and freedom to act: being responsible, but not authorized; leadership as an ideal, but being unilaterally judged on managerial targets; needing to be outward looking for the benefit of the horizontal alignment, but internally having your hands full with the operational processes and the vertical alignment. Opportunities because the third space professional has a lot of tacit knowledge that he can utilize in multiple different areas. Precisely because there are so many innovations taking place simultaneously and because they are only loosely connected, there is an asymmetrical difference in power and resources. Because of the loose connections, the third space professional can quite autonomously from the centre within the education hierarchy shape the direction of the organization. Because of the loose connections, it is easier (and more important) for the third space professional to make their own choices and to, for instance, translate and implement fragmented knowledge within/to the organization and in that way offer new suggestions to his colleagues. Nobody can really verify who set out the task or where it came from. That translation and interpretation by the third space professional is also called the "prism effect" (Kallenberg, 2013, 2015).

The fact that third space professionals have to deal with those innovations results in them being expected to be able to work with competing values and a high degree of uncertainty and ambiguity. The third space professional is not the executor of tasks devised by others, but he is the key player that can give direction to innovations. This appeals to his ability for self-direction and to his skills. Without skills in problem solving, communication (sending and receiving), negotiation (building trust and identity) and coordination (information sharing and encouraging processes), he won't be able to retain his position for long, no matter how good his ideas are.

This implies that the role of academic middle managers in higher education must be reconciled as being fundamentally and unquestionably relational in its entirety. It's a highly complex relational endeavour, characterized by compromises that are negotiated amidst leadership structures, hierarchies and relations (Branson, Franken & Penney, 2016). Throughout, the emphasis is that for middle leaders, the relations that they have to navigate and negotiate are multi-faceted and multi-directional, involving relations up, down and across organizational structures and networks. Middle leaders are shown to be acutely aware that their decisions and the decisions of other staff variously impact upon the context and relations that they are working amidst (Branson, Franken & Penney, 2016).

To meet all the expectations, the third space professional must be able to quickly switch from one role to the other (from manager to subordinate or colleague; from generalist to specialist); must be able to speak several 'languages'; able to translate abstract and strategic language into concrete and operational language; the language of the academics and the language of the administrators. The third space professional is a key player within the faculty, playing a pivotal role through his ability to control and influence the flow of information between the academic staff and the senior administrative team. The third space professional must be able to both sit down at the negotiating table and seek compromises, and to discuss the content of academic subjects with colleagues. He gathers both insight into the strategy of the top management, and insight in the desires of the students, the strategies of competitors and operational processes and technologies. He keeps an eye both on the outside world (new social development, demand for innovations) and on the organization (the professional layer, demands for peace and stability).

The strength of the third space professional is primarily conceptualized as intervening and relational. The building of collegiality, cooperation and teamwork should not be seen as merely a part of their role, but rather be understood as the very essence of their leadership. Therefore, there are three competing expectations inherent in this middle leader's role: collegiality, professionalism and authority. Collegiality highlights the need to communicate honestly in order to build a culture of mutual trust and respect. The third space professional attempts to find that collegiality by building networks and connecting departments with individual employees from those departments (the hubs) creating pathways that positively influence innovation processes. Mapping these networks give us a clear idea about the possibilities of the third space professional to align people and policy. Professionalism brings to the fore the delegated responsibilities to ensure adherence to professional standards and to monitor peer performance in relation to those standards. Authority brings to the fore the matter of why others should do what the middle leader asks of them. Because of the sandwich-position of the third space professional, the expectation of the authority is a difficult one, because of he has to enact synchronistically the roles of being a subordinate, an equal and a superior. Third space professionals have to perform a balancing act in order to meet expectations from the formal organization that has assigned them as leaders (external mandate), but also in order to gain and maintain an internal mandate from the teachers they work with and lead (internal mandate)(Martensson & Roxa, 2016).

The third space professional was central to this article. The third space professional can be divided into academic middle managers and educational administrators. Both types of actors overlap in how they are positioned, with the same limitations and opportunities, and how they function. There is a subtle difference, however, in the latter because the academic middle manager is primarily focused on intervening tasks and relational tasks, while the educational administrator is mainly focused on result-oriented tasks and intervening tasks. Both actors work closely together: the academic middle manager from an administrative responsibility, the educational administrator from a managerial responsibility. The quality of this cooperation has, in my opinion, a major influence on the quality of the content and process of innovations within the organization, as they must complement and support each other. If such cooperation is not optimal, it will quickly lead to sluggishness in the innovation process. The educational administrator is working "in the shadow of hierarchy" and is therefore more likely to be the victim of political and administrative changes.

#### *Keywords:*

Academic middle manager, educational administrator, third space professional, interacting spheres model, academics, administrators, mid level leadership, middle leaders

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